



PSYCHOLOGICAL JOURNEY OF YUVANASHVA AND SHILAVATI IN *THE PREGNANT KING*

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Abstract

Devdutt Pattanaik is a well-known name among the readers of Indian mythology at present time. In this paper we have selected two major characters from his debut novel *The pregnant King* (2008). These characters are: Yuvanashva, the protagonist, and Shilavati, his mother. Since the novel covers much of the life of Shilavati from her teenage to old age when her grandson becomes the king; and the life of Yuvanashva from his very birth to his renunciation of the worldly life at a later stage in his life, so here's an attempt to trace the psychological growth of the characters.

Keywords- Mythological Fiction, Psychoanalytical Criticism, Devdutt Pattanaik, *The Pregnant King*

Introduction

Born in 1970 in Mumbai, Devdutt Pattanaik has an MBBS degree from Grant Medical College, Mumbai. He then pursued his PG diploma in comparative mythology from Mumbai University. He worked for fifteen years for healthcare industry before he finally decided to work fulltime as a mythologists and an author. He writes columns for several renowned newspapers, magazines and websites. He is also linked with many TV channels and film industry as a storytelling consultant. He has authored several books also. Among his famous mythological works are: *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata*, *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* and *My Gita*. He stepped into the realm of mythological fiction with his famous work *The Pregnant King*.

Discussion

Originally founded by Sigmund Freud, an Austrian neurologist, psychoanalytical criticism is a method of decoding literature, which primarily reasons that fictional works manifest secret desires and anxieties of the unconscious of the author. It is believed that even the psychoanalysis of characters in a work of literature is actually the study of the psyche of the author. Talking about the experience of psychoanalysis of patients, which can be further applied to analysis of literature, Freud says, "The dream-thoughts which we first come across as we proceed with our analysis often strike us by the unusual form in which they are expressed; they are not clothed in the prosaic language usually employed by our thoughts, but are on the contrary represented symbolically by means of similes and metaphors, in images resembling those of poetic speech" (26). One of the major ideas in psychoanalysis is that our actions are regulated by

the things already stored in our unconscious based on perennial events. Monte writes, "Psychoanalytic theories assume the existence of unconscious internal states that motivate an individual's overt actions" (Beneath the Mask, 8). Apart from studying a work of literature as a picture of an author's unconscious, psychoanalytical literary criticism is used for one of the following purposes: to study characters and to analyze their behaviours; to study the appeal of a literary work on its readers; and to study diction and symbols used in a literary text.

Carl Gustav Jung states legends and myths to be an expression of basic human behaviour. Psychoanalytical criticism believes that works of literature and symbols used in them are grounded upon those myths, which dates way back in the past. He gave the term "collective unconscious" for it.

Mythology provides roots to a culture. The study of myths is not limited to a single age. They are part of human nature. Various concepts, rituals and symbols in a culture are established with the help of popular myths. They work like a unifying force in a larger society. At the same time these myths act as a device for literary writers. Many Indian English writers used this device in their writings during the time of India's struggle for its freedom. *Kanthapura* by Raja Rao can serve as an example here.

In recent decades, the old myths are being reframed and new myths are being created in literature. Mythology based fiction has emerged as a favorite genre among the readers of fiction. Mythological fiction has drawn myths out of their religious boundaries and it has given those fresh perspectives and various new interpretations. The characters in them are being less gods or super-humans and more humans. The point of narration has drastically changed as one or more of the characters of popular myths are appointed to serve to narrate things according to their personal experiences. It has enabled readers to visualize things in an entirely new way. The characters and plots are employed not only to question the popular myths but also to connect them with the issues and ideologies which are contemporary.

The present study focuses upon two of the major characters from Devdutt Pattanaik's novel *The*

Pregnant King (2008). One of these is the title character, the king who literally got pregnant, and the other one is his mother.

While studying a work of fiction, one can consider looking at it from various perspectives, such as: the structure of the plot, the variety of themes involved, the use of images and the characters. A close study of a character in a work of fiction is almost synonymous to the study and interpretation of the psychological journey of that character. The rest of the characters and all the events in a story make up in his/her psychological pursuit.

The Pregnant King chiefly focuses on the mental trauma which the protagonist Yuvanashva undergoes. He marries three times so that he can have a baby but couldn't for years. His biggest misfortune is that unless he has a baby his mother wouldn't let him rule the kingdom of Vallabhi which she manages as a monarch on his behalf right from the time when he was in his mother's womb and after his father died. His yearning to rule the kingdom reaches the climax when he is invited to participate in the battle of the Mahabharata and his mother refuses him to go since he hadn't fathered a child till then. With the council of his friend Vipula and somewhat due to his own burning desire of becoming a King, he manages to take the charge of the kingdom from his mother's hands to his own. Right after this moment he starts to neglect his mother and all her advice and due to this the decision of the first case that he judges proves to be fatal for him. In the course of the story, Yuvanashva, who accidentally drinks the magic potion, which was obviously meant for the queens, and he gets pregnant. The birth of the child was kept a secret from the public of the kingdom. Later, he was declared to be the son of his first queen.

Yuvanashva is confused whether he is the only one i.e. a man to give birth to a child or any similar instances are also there. His hunt introduces several related instances and stories in the text. Towards the end the king leaves for forest in search of an appropriate and perfect answer to his query of superiority of a man or a woman according to religion. The answer to this is ultimately found in the

image of Lord Shiva half a man and the other half a woman.

Among all the female characters in the novel, the most powerful character undoubtedly is the character of Shilavati. In fact, her character is as strong as the title character the pregnant king Yuvanashva, her son. Shilavati is the eldest daughter of Ahuka, King of Avanti. She has a younger brother Nabhaka. Her brother wants to be a poet and a musician but is denied to do that because he is to rule his kingdom, simply because he is a male. She had the ability and ambition to rule. Though she doesn't have schooling as her brother yet she is a keen listener. She notices each and everything minutely what happens at the court of her father or the discussions that they have. Thus without formal schooling she excels her brother, but she is denied to rule simply because she is a female. Her father very well knows the wish of her daughter.

The fate gives her a chance that can make her fulfill her desire to rule but on the expense of her widowhood. Her father grabs the chance for her good. After her marriage with Prasenajit, she dutifully follows her husband's command and that is why she goes for hunting with him and stays in the jungle. This two years phase of her married life is very important as it marks a transformation from domestic to political life. She learns archery from her husband which suggests her accepting those duties which are reserved for men in a male dominated society.

One exceptional quality in Shilavati is that she always knows how to turn negatives into positives. Shilavati is an expert in changing things according to her own ease. This skill makes her able to survive her identity among so many obstacles. For example a widow is not allowed to chew Tambula because it makes a person feel erotic but she says that it makes her think clear. Most of the times, she resorts to religious scriptures to prove her point though she has never read scriptures but she has heard them discussed at her father's court in her childhood. Her deep and keen understanding of scriptures outwits such wise persons as Mandavya. She has mind sharp enough to find a loophole in rules. She is advocate of her rights.

Shilavati presents a fine example of a wise politician. She never recommends war over prosperity and peace. To rule is not a bed full of roses for Shilavati. Her biggest obstacle is her being a woman. From the very childhood she faces this obstacle. Her mother stops her father to manage to provide her a proper education just because she is a girl. It takes a lot of courage for Pruthalashva to accept that his kingdom will eventually be handed over to a woman. His disillusionment with the world is primarily due to the fact that his son will die soon and then his daughter-in-law will be ruling the kingdom. Similarly, it is not easy for Mandavya to gulp down the prophecy that Shilavati is a fit bride for Prasenajit because he doubts a woman's ability to rule. When Shilavati visits the Ashram with Yuvanashva to meet Pruthalashva, he tells her: "Men are foolish. We actually believe that just because someone has a moustache they make better kings than someone with breasts... I wish my son had not died. But had he lived, and had he confined you to the women's quarters, as he would, in foolish male pride, Vallabhi would not be what it is today." (65)

Finally, the kingdom is snatched from her by her son. She is made to retire whereas she always wished well for her son. We see how lonely she becomes in her retirement. If she were not a woman she would not have to suffer all this. Overall, we can't help ourselves wondering at her abilities and dedication. We can't help ourselves from comparing her to her son as a monarch. This comparison proves her better fortune in this field.

After Shilavati, there are three other female characters in the novel which have important place in the story. These are the three wives of Yuvanashva. At the age of thirteen Yuvanashva marries with Simantini, the princess of Udra. After five years of marriage when the couple is unable to bear a child and people start to gossip about virility of Yuvanashva, Shilavati decides to bring him another wife. His second wife is Pulomi, the princess of Vanga. She is bought in return of seven hundred cows, three hundred bullocks and a dozen bulls. This kind of marriage is told to be quite normal in Ilavrita. After this marriage, when the couple fails to bear a child, Matanga and his son Asanga, who are

expert in the art of healing, are appointed at the palace to provide the couple with all the necessary herbs and medicines to increase potency. Years pass and it is time for his next marriage. It is Matanga who advises Shilavati that Yuvanashva should marry a Shudra girl. Lower caste women are more fertile than the royal brides. He suggests that a potter in Tarini-pur has a daughter that can be a fit bride for the king. Keshini, the potter's daughter, is bought in return of a lot of riches.

Shilavati, in *The Pregnant King*, also undergoes alienation. Though she rules the kingdom, yet she is not considered a ruler by the world at large because she is a woman. For them she is just a caretaker. During coronation ceremony when Mandavya puts the tilak mark just above her nose: "It was then that Shilavati realized that the parasol, the bow, the conch-shell trumpets, the banners, the obeisance and the flowers were not for her. They were all for him who was inside her, she realized. The unborn prince. The future king of Vallabhi. Her son, Yuvanashva" (37). What was the stand of the people outside her kingdom regarding her being a ruler is reflected by the following paragraph: "It hurt Shilavati terribly when the invitation to Yudhisthira's coronation was addressed to her young son. It reminded her that while everyone in Vallabhi treated her as a worthy ruler, for the rest of Ilavrita she was just a king's widow. Inauspicious" (50-51).

The troubles which Shilavati go through symbolize the condition of modern women in male-dominated world. After her husband dies she has to make a lot of sacrifices. For example she doesn't eat the tasty food which she herself cooks for her son, even after her son entertains her to share it with him and she craves for it. She is reluctant to handover the kingdom to Yuvanashva unless he becomes a father. Even after three marriages and time period of more than thirty years when Yuvanashva is unable to impregnate any of his wives, he becomes restless to rule. His friend Vipula, the son of Mandavya, ignites his restlessness by saying that his mother deliberately doesn't want him to be king and denying his birthright for her own good. The public starts to gossip about her. They even call her names. In their strong wish to see Yuvanashva as their king

they start to believe her to be a witch who first murdered her husband and then somehow performed a magic so that her son was unable to father a child. Finally, the kingdom is snatched from her by her son. She is made to retire whereas she always wished well for her son. We see how lonely she becomes in her retirement. Her alienation becomes more intense when her son replaces her as a ruler. She remains almost confined in the inner quarters of the palace and even her suggestions are ignored by her son. If she were not a woman she would not have to suffer all this. Overall, we can't help ourselves wondering at her abilities and dedication. We can't help ourselves from comparing her to her son as a monarch. This comparison proves her better fortune in this field.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, Shilavati from the very beginning was mentally prepared to rule a kingdom and when the opportunity comes, she fulfills the responsibilities of a monarch quite effectively. We can see Yuvanashva going through a mental trauma for not being able to be a father and thus remaining away from the royal throne. But this trauma gets intense after he gets the throne, though for different reasons and after he fathers a child, it becomes even more intense. Finally he feels a release in the form of renunciation.

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